

# 1. Introduction

The Puget Sound Region is stuck in traffic. Over the past twenty years Washington State has experienced tremendous growth due to its economic opportunity and distinct landscape. However, transportation investments have not kept pace with growth and economic vitality, resulting in gridlock. As an economic and residential hub of the region, the I-405 corridor has been hit especially hard. The corridor includes Bellevue, the state's fourth



largest city, and 25 percent of the region's jobs as well as globally significant companies such as Microsoft and Boeing. Congestion, lasting up to 12 hours a day in some parts of the corridor, has led to costly delays for all users and increasing frustration.

Responding to the transportation crisis, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) gathered every city and transportation agency in the corridor to form the I-405 Corridor Program. The Program's goal was to create a comprehensive strategy to reduce congestion and improve mobility along I-405. In November 2001, following more than two years of intensive study, environmental review, and consensus building, the I-405 Program's Executive Committee selected the multi-modal I-405 Plan, establishing a 20-year vision for corridor-wide traffic relief and mobility.

The I-405 Plan is not one massive construction project, but an efficient and integrated system of investments for all transportation users—cars, transit, freight, carpools, vanpools, bicyclists, pedestrians and the environment. In fact, the Plan offers an unparalleled opportunity to improve traffic while fixing and enhancing environmental resources in the corridor.

This report presents a snapshot of the projects and strategies within the I-405 Plan, and documents the community partnership that led to an unprecedented agreement on a regional transportation solution for I-405.

## The Plan

- Reduces traffic congestion
- Improves mobility for people and freight
- Fixes key choke points such as the I-405 interchanges at SR-167, I- 90 and SR-520
- Enhances environmental quality
- Improves livability for communities within the corridor
- Supports a vigorous state and regional economy by responding to travel needs
- Accommodates planned regional growth

## How Did Traffic Get So Bad?



Originally built in the early 1960's as a bypass to Seattle, strong economic and population growth has transformed I-405 into the second-most-traveled corridor in the state, carrying over 600,000 people each day. In 1963, a second floating bridge across Lake Washington, State Route (SR) 520, opened up the Eastside to more commercial and residential development. As the only continuous, north-south roadway capable of moving high volumes of people and goods in the area east of Lake Washington, I-405 evolved into a key transportation facility serving the needs of the corridor's communities and businesses.

However, increased congestion and lack of mobility on I-405 is threatening the corridor's quality of life and economic future. Even with currently committed and planned transportation improvements, congestion and mobility problems for all forms of travel in the corridor are forecasted to get much worse over the next 20 years. The corridor will reach or exceed concurrency levels by 2020, limiting the region's ability to achieve its growth management objectives and increasing the pressure for urban sprawl.

## Community Action



Requests for the state to provide traffic relief came from frustrated Eastside residents, businesses, developers and the Eastside Transportation Partnership (ETP), a coalition formed by corridor interests in 1986 to address traffic problems.

### Top concerns in the corridor

- Severe congestion, on regional freeways and local arterials
- Traffic intrusion into neighborhoods and business districts
- Reduced automobile, pedestrian and bicycle safety
- Degradation of air quality and increased noise levels
- Access limitations to jobs, services, recreation and health care, particularly for low income, the young and the elderly
- Severe limits on the ability of transit to provide timely levels of service at reasonable costs

## **I-405 Corridor Program Goals**

The goal of the I-405 Corridor Program was to create a comprehensive strategy to reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility, safety and the quality of life for communities in the I-405 Corridor.

More than 30 corridor cities and public agencies responsible for planning, regulating and implementing transportation improvements were gathered by WSDOT to participate in the Program's decision making.

The Program also included a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), concentrating on broad corridor-wide issues related to travel modes and transportation system performance. The EIS enabled decisions to focus on mode choice, the general location of improvements and how combinations of improvements could work together as a comprehensive system.

## **Additional Resources**

The I-405 Final Recommendation Report is one of five reports (see Appendix A) prepared for the EIS documenting the I-405 Corridor Program.

### **Plan decision process**

- Background Report
- Alternatives Report
- Draft EIS
- Final EIS